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ABSTRACT

This article presents a model for teaching counseling theory prior to a graduate student's first practicum in counseling. The model was developed to present current theories to graduate students in counseling, to develop student self-awareness by having students apply the theories to themselves, and to enable students to practice each theory in a structured situation. The course described incorporates many ideas already presented in the literature about the value of didactic/experiential training, modeling, written, and in vivo practice. The application of the instructional format is described, with emphasis placed on practicing skills immediately following the presentation of each theory. Four methods of student evaluation in the course are discussed: (1) evaluating student ability to apply the theory to himself or herself; (2) evaluating student ability to compare and contrast two theories in depth; (3) evaluating student knowledge of the theoretical concepts and methods; and (4) evaluating student ability to translate theory into practice. It is noted that students must demonstrate competence in all four areas before they are approved for their first practicum experience. Results are given from student ratings on course evaluations administered by a third party, the ratings being 4.72 (N=17) and 4.8 (N=17) respectively, on a 5-point scale with 5 being the highest mark. Examples of student comments are included which tend to support the quality and usefulness of the experience. (Author/NB)

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From the Classroom to the Counseling Room: a pre-practicum course in counseling theory

Martha C. McBride

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Abstract

This article presents a model for teaching counseling theory prior to the first practicum. The course incorporates many ideas already presented in the literature about the value of didactic/experiential training, modeling, written and in vivo practice. The model was developed to (a) present current theories to graduate students in counseling, (b) develop student self-awareness by having them apply the theories to themselves, and (c) enable students to practice each theory in a structured situation. The application of the instructional format is described. Emphasis is placed on practicing skills immediately following the presentation of each theory. Students are evaluated four ways in the course: on the ability to apply the theory to themselves,on the ability to compare and contrast two theories in depth, on knowledge of the theoretical concepts and methods, and on their ability to translate theory into practice. Students must demonstrate competence in all four areas before they are approved for their first practicum experience. Student ratings on course evaluations administered by a third party were 4.72 (N=17) and 4.8 (N=17) respectively, on a 5 point scale. Student comments tend to support the quality and usefulness of the experience to them.

The teaching of counseling theory as both a foundation for counseling practice and a source of methodology for the counselor trainee has all but disappeared from discussion in the literature. From Strickland's (1969) discussion of the role of philosophy and theory in training students for counseling effectiveness to C.H. Patterson's (1986) concern about the need to provide more instruction in theory in counselor education programs, there has been a void in the literature not only about the role of counseling theory in training programs, but also about how best to teach those theories in a meaningful way. One explanation for this is that counselor educators have galloped headlong into facilitative or basic skills training, sometimes as a substitute for teaching students counseling theory and practice (Patterson,1986). In reviewing the literature on theory and pre-practicum courses, the author found only one article containing a description of a theory and practice course. This article, by Burck, Jacobs, Sauber, Stone, and Thomson (1973), was written 15 years ago and followed the current trend in counselor education of teaching "common elements" (p. 170) of several theories; in the course outline, these appear as basic skills (questions, reflections, genuineness, empathy and so forth) with no recognizable theories listed anywhere.

Several articles on pre-practicum courses were reviewed. Among the goals for Hackney's (1971) model were: "developing a tolerance for silence, learning to listen, learning to identify the feeling component of communications, . . .[and] developing strategies for opening the interview, determining communication content, terminating the interview, giving referrals, and terminating the counseling relationship. . . ."(pp.104-105) Emener (1973) suggested that the pre-practicum experience can provide training in such skills as "(a) ability to evaluate and recognize helpful interpersonal behavior; (b) ability to communicate those conditions conducive to a helping interpersonal relationship. . .; and (c) familiarity with the media and techniques used in practicum." (p. 218) Thus, both Hackney (1971) and Emener (1973) described models for a pre-practicum experience with the focus on training in basic skills. Prusok and K.R. Felker (1972) presented a technique using dyads to overcome problems with using coached

clients. S. Felker (1973) described a pre-practicum course with presentations of different theoretical approaches by speakers who preferred the particular approach they were presenting, but she did not link those theories to the practice or self-awareness components of her model.

The role of the supervisor in a pre-practicum class has received scant attention. Emener (1973) suggested that the pre-practicum supervisor should be able to teach, demonstrate, and model counseling skills while concurrently promoting the positive growth of counselor trainees. Hackney (1971) suggested that the pre-practicum focus on skill deficiencies with the supervisor using a teaching/training focus. Other articles reviewed failed to address the issue of supervision in the prepracticum process.

Rationale for the Course

Parker (1968) asked the question, "Should a prospective counselor be taught one systematic approach or be exposed to many with encouragement to select. . .an approach that fits him?" Our program faculty have adopted the position that, in the first practicum, students are encouraged to stick to one counseling theory or approach rather than attempt to be eclectic. Students are allowed to choose theories which best fit their own style (McBride & Martin, 1987). In order to do that, students must be exposed to a variety of current theories and approaches and have the opportunity to practice them.

The author with help from other faculty, has developed a course which builds upon the foundation of facilitative communication skills by adding knowledge, self-awareness, and skills from current counseling theory and practice. The prerequisite for this course is a full semester of facilitative skill training. The model incorporates many ideas already presented in the literature about the value of didactic/experiential training, modeling, written and *in vivo* practice. The course is based upon foundation of facilitative communication skills and adds knowledge, self-awareness, and methods from current counseling theory and practice. The goals of the course are to (a) present current theories to graduate students in counseling, (b) develop student self-awareness by having them apply the theories to themselves, and (c) enable students to practice using each theory in a laboratory situation.

The course is organized into separate lecture and laboratory sections. During the lecture section, current theories and approaches are presented by faculty who either favor or have expertise in a particular approach. The theories/approaches covered are: psychoanalytic,existential, Adlerian, person-centered, gestalt, transactional analysis, the behavior therapies, rational emotive therapy, and reality therapy. Psychoanalytic and existential theories are presented for their contributions to more current approaches, as background and historical material. Each presenter discusses the philosophical roots of his/her approach, theoretical assumptions about the nature of human beings, development of personality, and human dysfunctioning. Each presenter demonstrates the application of the methodology arising from the theory. This includes the use of videotapes of some of the 'founding fathers'are used, such as the Rogers, Perls, and Ellis films (1965), along with tapes which different faculty members have made demonstrating the use of a particular theory. Live demonstrations are also used whenever possible. The goal of this portion of the courseis to expose students to "assumptions and and principals that guide practice--the why, . . .,which should derive from philosophy and theory" (Patterson, 1986, p. 11).

In addition to reading relevant chapters in the text, students are required to read two theories or approaches in the original; for example, they might read Carl Rogers' work for the person-centered approach or Albert Ellis' for rational emotive therapy. To demonstrate intellectual understanding of the two theoretical approaches, students write a theory paper. This is not one of those personal theory papers so popular in the 1970's with counselor educators; we believe, along with Patterson (1985), that our students do not have the expertise to do that. What we do require is that they compare and contrast their chosen theoretical approaches in terms of philosophy, personality theory, view of human dysfunction, and prescripion for change.

The development of self-awareness occurs initially through the use of written exercises. After the presentation of a particular theory or approach in class, students apply the theory to themselves in writing. Students are, for example, asked to examine their values in relation to the tenets of person-centered therapy, to explore their unfinished business within the gestalt approach, or to discover their own irrational beliefs as a part of studying rational emotive therapy. Students have reported that completing the written assignments had a powerful impact, often producing tears, insight, and in some cases,behavior change. Students also have the opportunity to experience the impact of a theory by volunteering to be part of a demonstration in class with the presenting faculty member.

Laboratory Practice

Following the presentation of each theoretical approach in the lecture section of the class, students practice the same theory in the laboratory. Worthington and Roehlke (1979) found that beginning counselors-in-training wanted their supervisors to directly teach them, in a supportive way, how to counsel, and to encourage them to try out their skills within a strucured environment. The supervisors in the laboratory portion of this course use a teaching/training approach in a structured situation (Cross & Brown, 1983; Ronnestad (1977); Stoltenberg (1981;). The practice sessions are held in counseling rooms with one-way mirrors.The laboratory portion of the course utilizes dyads composed of counselor and counselee with another student dyad observing (Prusok & Felker, 1972). Trainees in the role of client have absolute control over what they choose to share when in the role of the client and are assured of and confidentiality is strictly upheld. The dyads are allowed 20 minute sessions in which the counselor attempts to use to practice the specific theory and approach being studied with any issue presented by the counselee.

The instructor, the faculty member who presented the theory to the class, and various lab assistants (advanced students) serve as supervisors. The supervisors intervene directly in the practice sessions by going into the room when a student needs help. The

supervisor instructs or models the way to use the theory being practiced (Hansen, Robins, & Grimes, 1982; Kurpius, Froehle, & Robinson, 1980; Stone and Vance,1976). Supervisors also use a modified Interpersonal Process Recall (Kagan, 1972) approach to help students get in touch with what is really going on with them, what they are thinking and feeling, and what may getting in their way in the session. At the end of the session, the observers, students and supervisors, give feedback on each student's performance as the counselor.

Evaluation

Students are evaluated four ways in the course: on their ability to apply the theory to themselves (written exercises),on their ability to compare and contrast two theories in depth (theory paper), on their knowledge of the theoretical concepts and methods presented in the course (final exam), and on their ability to translate theory into practice (laboratory practice). After successful completion of the course, students are allowed to enroll in the first practicum experience. Students must demonstrate competency in all four areas before they are approved for their first practicum experience.

Student evaluation forms are routinely administered by the College of Education. The same standardized form is used for all faculty. Instructors may not be present while the students are completing the evaluation and may not see the evaluations until after grades are posted. Course evaluation forms were examined for student feedback on the value of this experience to them. Students could rate the course on a 5 point scale with 5 being Excellent and 1, Unsatisfactory. Forms collected during two semesters of one academic year gave the course in which the model was applied a 4.72 (N=17) and 4.8 rating (N=17) respectively . Sample comments from students on the course evaluations were:

> "The class really draws things together; best class in program (for me) thus far in terms of usefulness and content."
>
> "Without a doubt the most interesting, challenging course I have taken in <u>years</u>!"
>
> "I liked the balanced modalities in learning (text, lecture, lab, observations, videos); a valuable course."

"I like the way we go into the lab experience with little stress and trauma."

"I enjoyed hearing from the various lecturers; they added dimension to the material from the reading."

"The course was demanding and stimulating--made me learn!"

In addition, faculty observing the students in the laboratory have commented on how practicing each theory has helped students strengthen their basic skills and the fluency with which they handle themselves in a counseling situation. Students have been observed to be more comfortable, more confident, and to demonstrate more depth in the "common components" (Burck, Jacobs, Sauber, Stone, and Thomson,1973) of many theories. In addition, students are able to find out if the approaches they have been attracted to intellectually still fit them after they have practiced them. Practicum supervisors, receiving students from this pre-practicum experience into their practicum sections, have remarked at the improving skill level of students entering beginning practicum.

Discussion

As Paravonian (1981) has noted, the goals for pre-service education should include: (a) knowledge about practice, including broad theoretical knowledge as well as knowledge of specialized procedures and techniques, (b) ability to apply knowledge and skills in both real and simulated situations, and (c) self-concept congruent with the demands of the profession. The pre-practicum course offers counselor educators the opportunity to bridge the gap between student acquisition of theoretical knowledge and student ability to translate theory into practice. Having students apply a specific theory in a laboratory situation after the didactic presentation has seemed to us to help students test out the theories being studied and to enhance many intangible qualities that may be difficult to specify. Students not only develop a more complete theoretical understanding, butalso begin to discoverwhat they prefer and which approaches fit their personal style. By building upon rather than relying soley on a base of

facilitative skill training, students enter beginning practicum at a higher skill level, with more tools at their fingertips. After "trying on" methodologies from a number of theories, students will be able to begin narrowing the field. Thus, students have some basis from which to choose a theory to learn and to apply in their first practicum.

The emphasis on basic skill training in the pre-practicum literature leaves counselor education at a dead end. The work of Truax and Carkhuff (1967) and Ivey, et. al. (1968) is certainly central to the mission of counselor education; with the research on the various skill training programs supporting this notion, and no one in our field would deny its importance in counselor training. However, as Matarazzo and Patterson (1986) have pointed out, micro-training has demonstrated its effectiveness "at the level for which it was intended: . . . relatively inexperienced undergraduate and graduate students"(p. 827). Hansen, Pound, and Petro (1976) have also stated that, "Although teaching facilitative communication is necessary, it is not sufficient"(p. 114). If our students are to move beyond being merely technicians (Brammer, 1966), if the products of our training programs are to be truly professionals (McBride & Martin, 1986), then they need to be given knowledge and experiences that build on the basic skill training models without stopping there.

One conclusion developed by Matarazzo and Patterson (1986) in their review of "Methods of Teaching Therapeutic Skill" is the "need to identify the training requirements of more advanced graduate students,[and to] develop means to address those needs . . ."(p. 835) A starting point might be to teach counseling theories by incorporating practice of those theories as a key component. This article has presented a model for a counseling theory course which can bridge the gap between training at beginning levels (facilitative skills) and training at a more advanced and sophisticated level, with the end product being a truly professional counselor.

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